



a reviewing Agency psychological expert, and his formulation of Plaintiff's Residual Functional Capacity.<sup>1</sup> See Plaintiff's "Memorandum ..." at 4-8 (document #12). He also assigns error to the ALJ's conclusion that he would be off task no more than nine percent of the work day. Id. at 8-12.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

The Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) and § 1383(c)(3), limits this Court's review of a final decision of the Commissioner to: (1) whether substantial evidence supports the Commissioner's decision, Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 390, 401 (1971); and (2) whether the Commissioner applied the correct legal standards. Hays v. Sullivan, 907 F.2d 1453, 1456 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Hunter v. Sullivan, 993 F.2d 31, 34 (4th Cir. 1992) (per curiam). The District Court does not review a final decision of the Commissioner de novo. Smith v. Schweiker, 795 F.2d 343, 345 (4th Cir. 1986); King v. Califano, 599 F.2d 597, 599 (4th Cir. 1979); Blalock v. Richardson, 483 F.2d 773, 775 (4th Cir. 1972).

As the Social Security Act provides, "[t]he findings of the [Commissioner] as to any fact, if supported by substantial evidence, shall be conclusive." 42 U.S.C. § 405(g). In Smith v. Heckler, 782 F.2d 1176, 1179 (4th Cir. 1986), quoting Richardson v. Perales, 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971), the Fourth Circuit defined "substantial evidence" thus:

Substantial evidence has been defined as being "more than a scintilla and do[ing] more than creat[ing] a suspicion of the existence of a fact to be established. It means such relevant evidence as a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion."

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<sup>1</sup>The Social Security Regulations define "Residual Functional Capacity" as "what [a claimant] can still do despite his limitations." 20 C.F.R. § 404.1545(a). The Commissioner is required to "first assess the nature and extent of [the claimant's] physical limitations and then determine [the claimant's] Residual Functional Capacity for work activity on a regular and continuing basis." 20 C.F.R. § 404.1545(b).

See also Seacrist v. Weinberger, 538 F.2d 1054, 1056-57 (4th Cir. 1976) (“We note that it is the responsibility of the [Commissioner] and not the courts to reconcile inconsistencies in the medical evidence”).

The Fourth Circuit has long emphasized that it is not for a reviewing court to weigh the evidence again, nor to substitute its judgment for that of the Commissioner, assuming the Commissioner’s final decision is supported by substantial evidence. Hays v. Sullivan, 907 F.2d at 1456 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Smith v. Schweiker, 795 F.2d at 345; and Blalock v. Richardson, 483 F.2d at 775. Indeed, this is true even if the reviewing court disagrees with the outcome – so long as there is “substantial evidence” in the record to support the final decision below. Lester v. Schweiker, 683 F.2d 838, 841 (4th Cir. 1982).

The question before the ALJ was whether Plaintiff became disabled at any time.<sup>2</sup> The Court has carefully reviewed the record, the authorities and the parties’ arguments. The ALJ thoroughly discussed the opinions from two psychological experts. Dr. Joseph Lanier saw Plaintiff consultatively, and Dr. Strobel-Nuss reviewed Plaintiff’s records including Dr. Lanier’s report. Although the ALJ generally gave “significant weight” to both opinions, he adopted Dr. Lanier’s conclusion that Plaintiff could perform jobs requiring the ability to understand and carry out detailed instructions. The ALJ’s conclusion that Plaintiff would be off task no more than nine

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<sup>2</sup>Under the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. § 301, et seq., the term “disability” is defined as an:

inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months...  
Pass v. Chater, 65 F. 3d 1200, 1203 (4th Cir. 1995).

percent of the work day is also consistent with Dr. Lanier's opinion. The ALJ applied the correct legal standards and his conclusion that Plaintiff was not disabled is supported by substantial evidence.

### **III. ORDER**

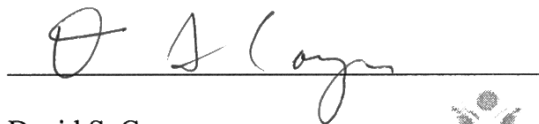
#### **NOW THEREFORE IT IS ORDERED:**

1. Plaintiff's "Motion for Summary Judgment" (document #11) is **DENIED**; Defendant's "Motion for Summary Judgment" (document #13) is **GRANTED**; and the Commissioner's decision is **AFFIRMED**.

2. The Clerk is directed to send copies of this Memorandum and Order to counsel for the parties.

**SO ORDERED.**

Signed: February 12, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D S Cayer", is written over a horizontal line.

David S. Cayer  
United States Magistrate Judge

